

CARVED 'DISEMBODIED EYES' OF TEOTIHUACAN

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Situated a few hours' drive northeast of Mexico City are the magnificent ruins of Teotihuacan, dating from the beginning of the first millennium A.D. Best known for two large, stepped pyramids (Pyramids of the Sun and Moon) and the smaller, more ornate Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl, the ruins abound in numerous low, labyrinthine buildings which are decorated with beautiful and complex mural paintings. The comparatively well-preserved Tepantitla murals are best known to scholars, a prominent segment having been restored and repainted in the Teotihuacan room of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City by Agustín Villagra Caletí. Portions of many other murals survive at Teotihuacan, while some, such as the important Zacuala murals, which are unprotected from the elements, are scarcely visible today.

In his 1973 book *The Mural Painting of Teotihuacan* (1), Arthur G. Miller drew attention to the prominence of the 'disembodied eyes' which occur repeatedly in the mural paintings of Teotihuacan. Figures 1-4 illustrate some typical examples of the recurrent 'disembodied eyes', motif. One of us (J.

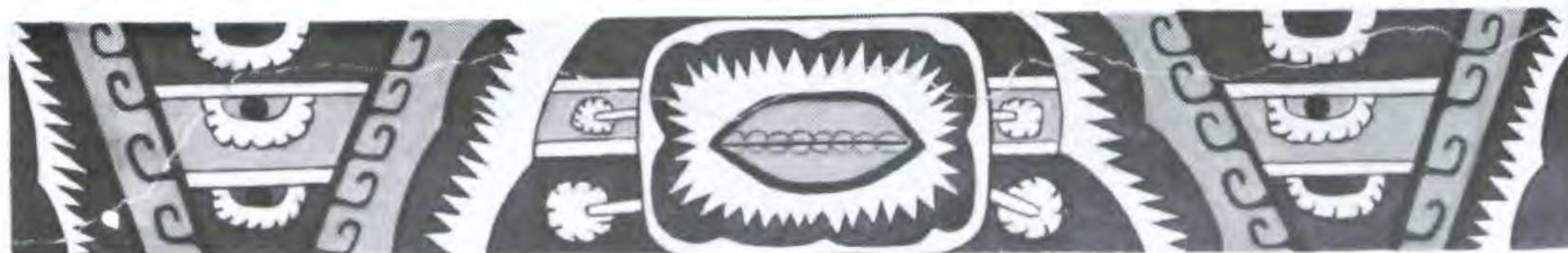


Figure 1. 'Predella' from Zacuala, Teotihuacan, repainted by Abel Mendoza. Notice 'disembodied eyes' flanking central motif representing four mushrooms surrounding the radiant 'logos'.

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Figure 2. Drops of entheogenic potion with appended 'disembodied eyes' from Teotihuacan murals. Reproduction by Margaret Seeler.

O.), during a recent visit to Teotihuacan, was struck by the ubiquity of these 'disembodied eyes', indeed, it was difficult to escape the sensation of being watched constantly.

We here comment on the existence of 'disembodied eyes' in relief carvings at Teotihuacan. The carvings are found on columns in a courtyard of a structure known as the Palace of Quetzalpapálotl*, located at the west corner of the square adjacent to the Pyramid of the Moon (Plates 44 & 45). The face



Figures 3 & 4. Drops of entheogenic potion and appended 'disembodied eyes' issuing from entheogenic flowers. Reproduction of fragments of Tepantitla murals by Margaret Seeler.

*The Palace of Quetzalpapálotl was excavated in 1962 and summarily restored under the direction of Mexican archaeologist Jorge R. Acosta. The structure dates from the sixth century A.D., belonging to the Teotihuacan III and IV eras. Details of the excavation and restoration can be found in Acosta's book *El Palacio del Quetzalpapálotl* (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, 1964).

of each column in the courtyard is adorned with two rows of four 'disembodied eyes' arrayed above and beneath a carving of a bird (Plate 46). The carved eyes are realistic and are inlaid with obsidian 'pupils' (Plates 47 & 48). The identification of the carvings as eyes is unequivocal—witness the corresponding inlay of obsidian to the eyes of the creature in the carvings, which represents a chimera called Quetzalpapálotl, 'quetzal bird/butterfly' (Plate 46). It is perhaps significant that the eye of the bird is round, as in nature birds' eyes appear, whereas the 'disembodied eyes' are distinctly anthropomorphic, with upper and lower 'eyelids' giving the 'eyeballs' an ovoid shape. On the north, south and east sides of the courtyard, the columns identically depict the avian chimera in profile (Plate 46), whereas the columns on the west side show a frontal view, possibly of the same creature (Plate 49).* The columns are surmounted by a broad lintel painted with a repeated motif, which in turn is crowned by a series of carved stone 'combs' (Plates 50 & 51).

In his book on the murals of Teotihuacan, Miller drew no conclusions as to the meaning of the 'disembodied eyes' or of the murals as a whole. One of us (R.G.W.) has proposed that the 'disembodied eyes' represent the visionary sight of the shaman or participant in an agape involving ingestion of a potion compounded of entheogenic mushrooms, morning glory seeds, or other plants with allied effects. This interpretation is based on the occurrence of mushrooms, flowers and seeds in juxtaposition with the 'disembodied eyes' (*vide* Figures 1–4), and the association of the eyes with green drops issuing from the flowers (green, the color of jade, signifies religious value), drops which are symbolic of the entheogenic potion. This theory is laid out in detail in *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* (2), which further suggests that the labyrinthine buildings of Teotihuacan, decorated with these entheogenic motifs, were groups of cenacula in which sacramental ingestion of entheogens

*Scholars have differed on the question whether one or two birds are here depicted. In a recent paper (*Ethnos* 32: 5–17, 1967) Arthur G. Miller summarizes the evidence and concludes that the bird depicted frontally represents an owl, whereas the bird depicted in profile represents the quetzal. Acosta, in his comments regarding his reconstruction of the columns, identified the profile birds as quetzal bird/butterfly chimeras, hence the name Quetzalpapálotl.

took place. The carved 'disembodied eyes' of the Palace of Quetzalpapálotl are further evidence confirming this hypothesis.

The 'disembodied eye' motif is not restricted to Mesoamerican art. Figure 5 illustrates the design on a gold ring, *circa* 1500 B.C., from Crete. The scene probably depicts an epiphany of the Great Mother goddess Artemis (the figure on the right) in the form of an anthropomorphic bee (3). The hierophants who attended the Ephesian Artemis were called *Essenes* or 'King Bees' and the later Greek mother goddesses, such as Rhea and Demeter, were attended by priestesses called *Melissae*, 'Bees' (4). It would seem that the four figures on the left of the ring represent the *Melissae*, bee-priestesses worshipping the goddess. A 'disembodied eye' is clearly represented near the center of the composition, between the goddess and her devotees. Here we have a representation of a visionary scene, from an Old World

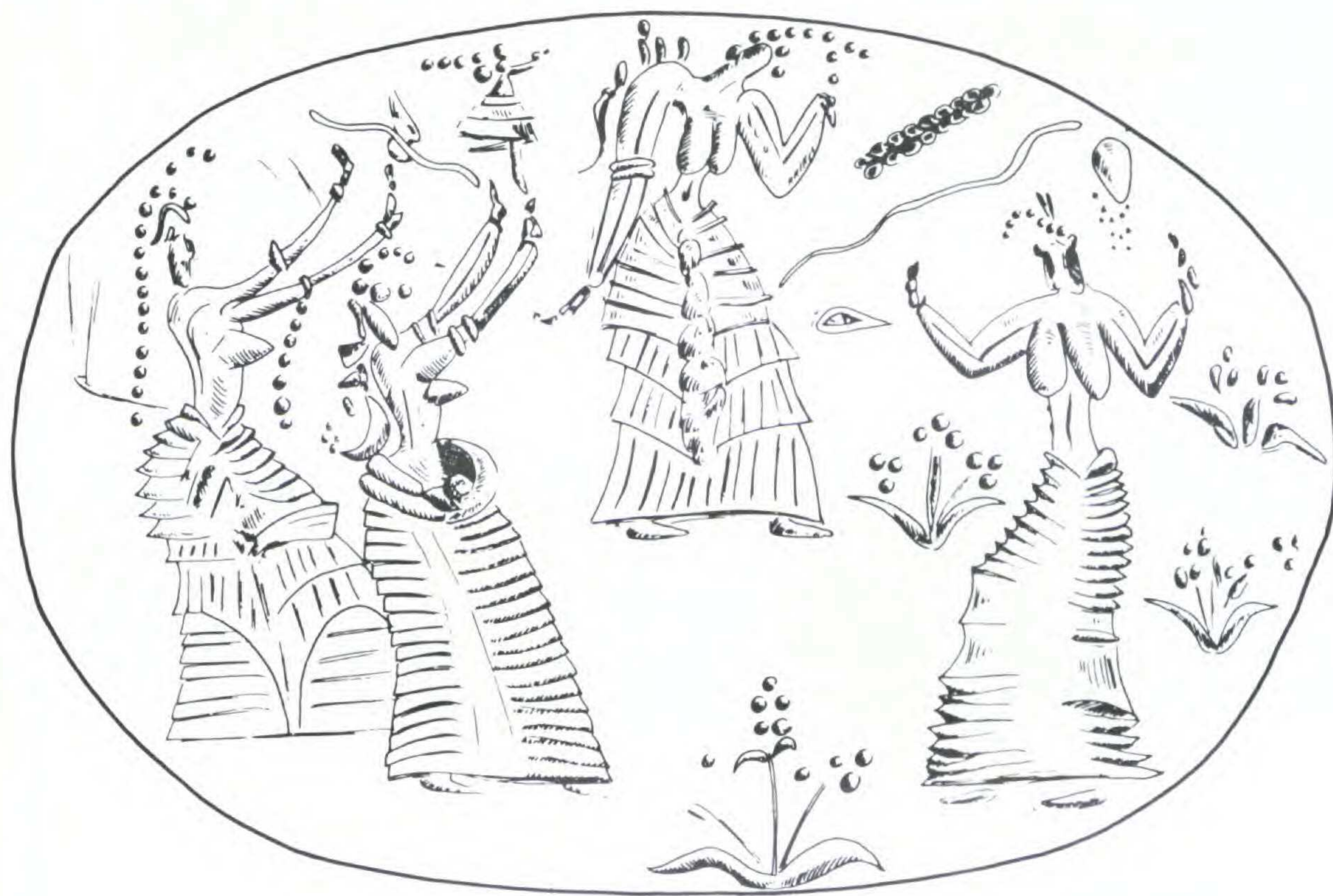


Figure 5. Gold ring of Isopata near Knossos, greatly enlarged. Scene depicts epiphany of goddess (presumably Artemis) on the right, and four worshippers, all represented as anthropomorphic bees. Note 'disembodied eye' in center, and plants (presumably entheogenic) surrounding goddess.

culture and antedating by two millennia the murals of Teotihuacan, yet accompanied also by a 'disembodied eye'. We now know that the Greek culture practiced religious rites based on ingestion of entheogenic potions (5-7), and it is not unreasonable to assume that earlier cultures, such as the Minoans and Mycenaeans, had similar rituals. Does not the Minoan ring from Crete depict an entheogenic vision of the goddess and her devotees in their mythological forms, as human/bee chimeras? It is significant that the goddess on the ring is surrounded by plants, presumably the source of the entheogenic potion.

The carvings of 'disembodied eyes' in the Palace of Quetzalpapálotl echo a motif common in murals found throughout the ruins of Teotihuacan. What can the 'disembodied eyes' represent, other than the visionary eye of the seer under the influence of one or other of the well-known pre-Columbian entheogens? Indeed, the image of the 'disembodied eye' suggested itself to one of us (R.G.W.) as a natural metaphor for the state produced by ingestion of entheogenic mushrooms. Written more than 25 years ago, in 1957 (8), long before the appearance of Miller's book and without his having seen the 'disembodied eyes' of the murals or columns, R.G.W.'s words are apposite:

There I was, poised in space, a disembodied eye,
invisible, incorporeal, seeing but not seen.

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PLATE 44



Plate 44., Looking north at Teotihuacan, with Pyramid of the Moon at right and Place of Quetzalpapálotl at left in foreground.

PLATE 45

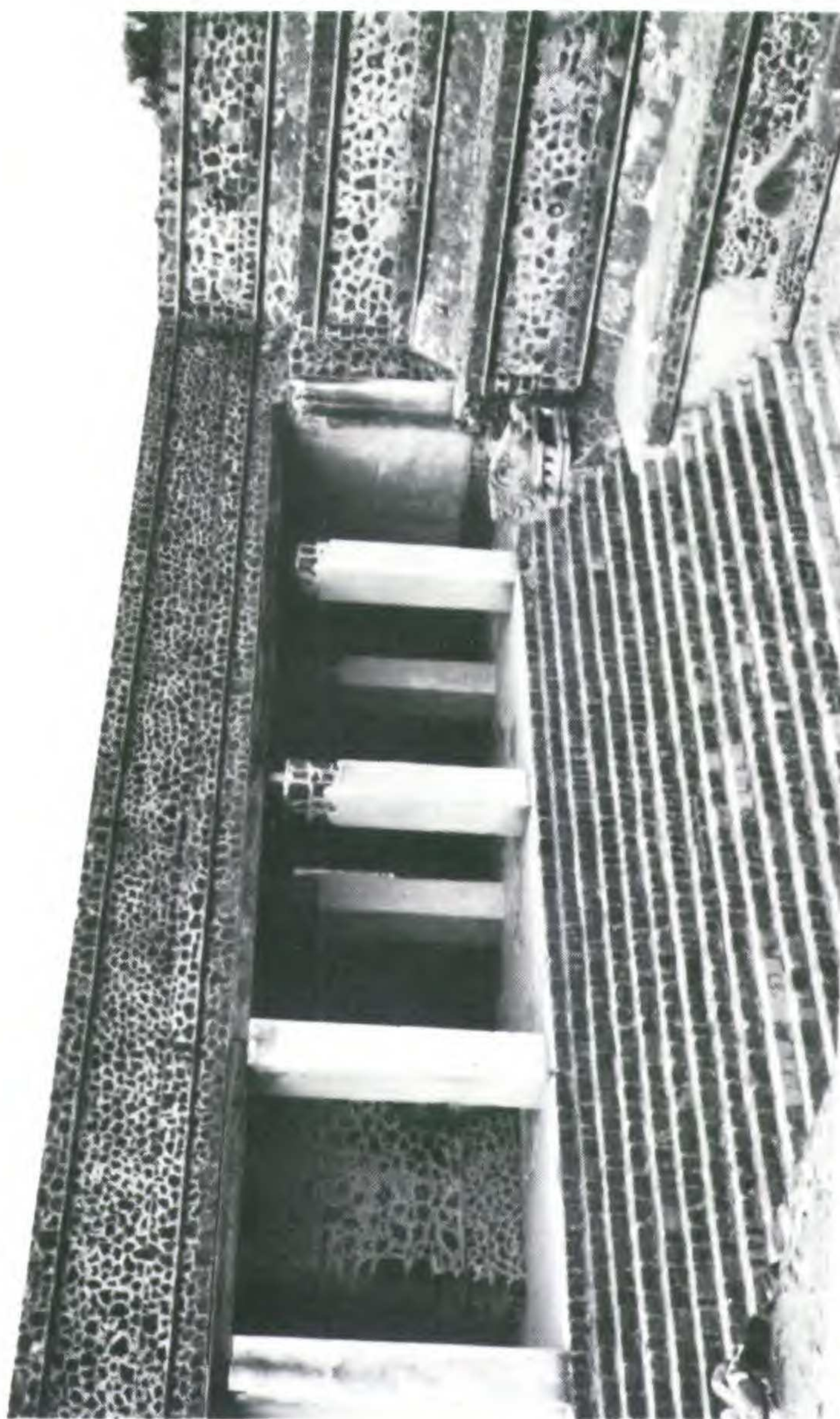


Plate 45. Entrance to Palace of Quetzalpapálotl at Teotihuacan.

PLATE 46

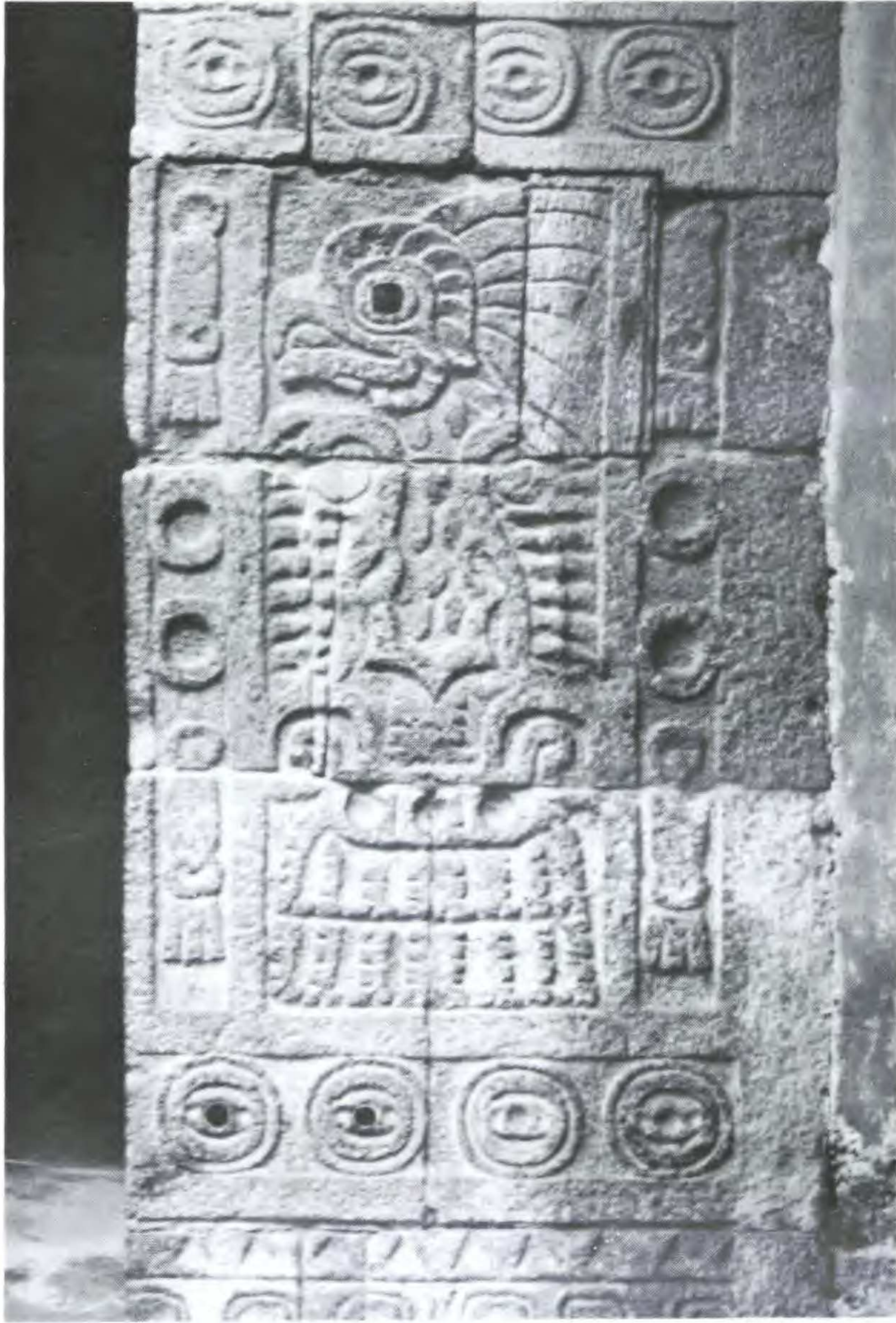


Plate 46. Column showing Quetzalpapálotl chimera and 'disembodied eyes'.

PLATE 47

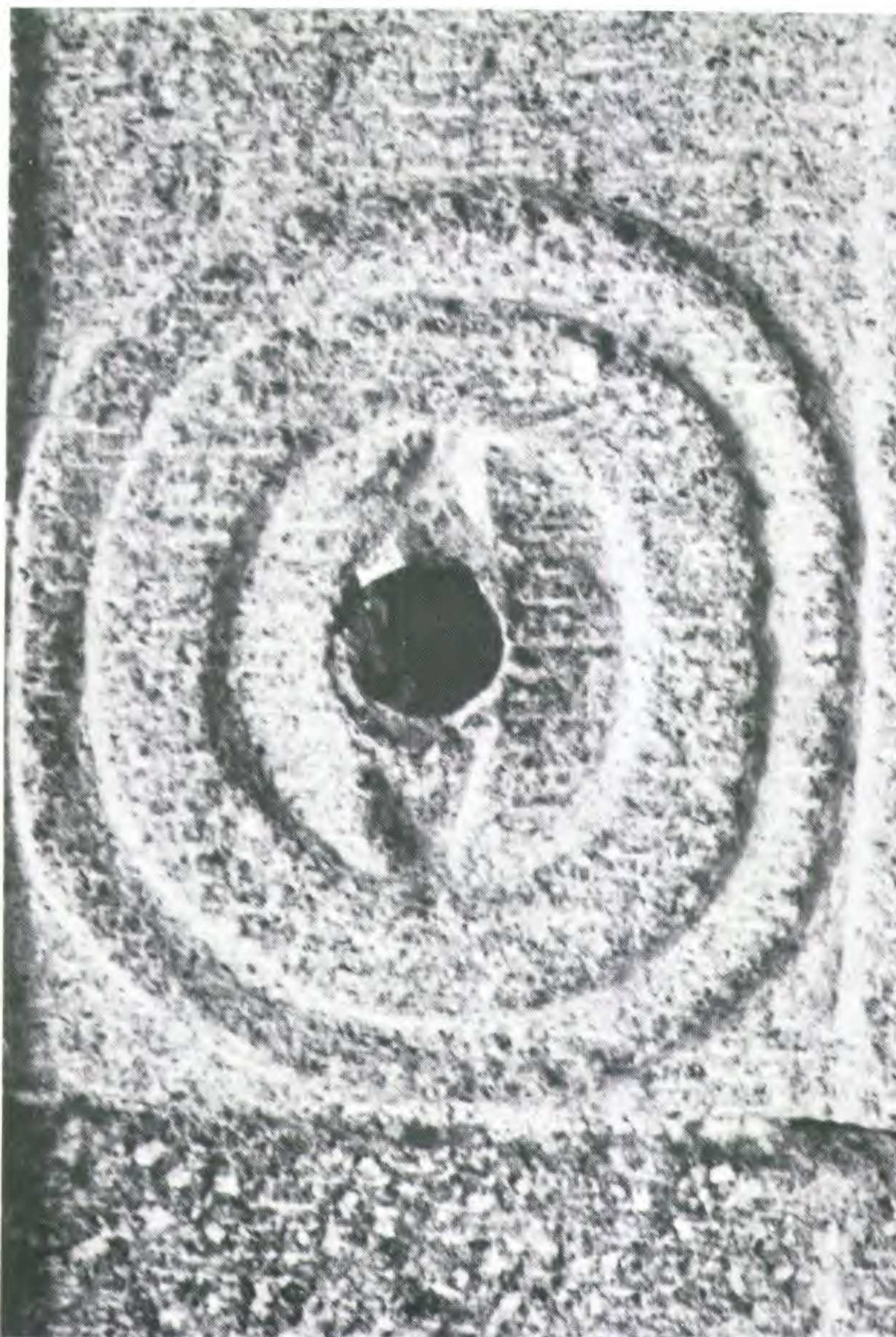


Plate 47. Closeup of 'disembodied eye' from column. Note inlaid obsidian 'pupil' and anthropomorphic 'eyelids'.

PLATE 48

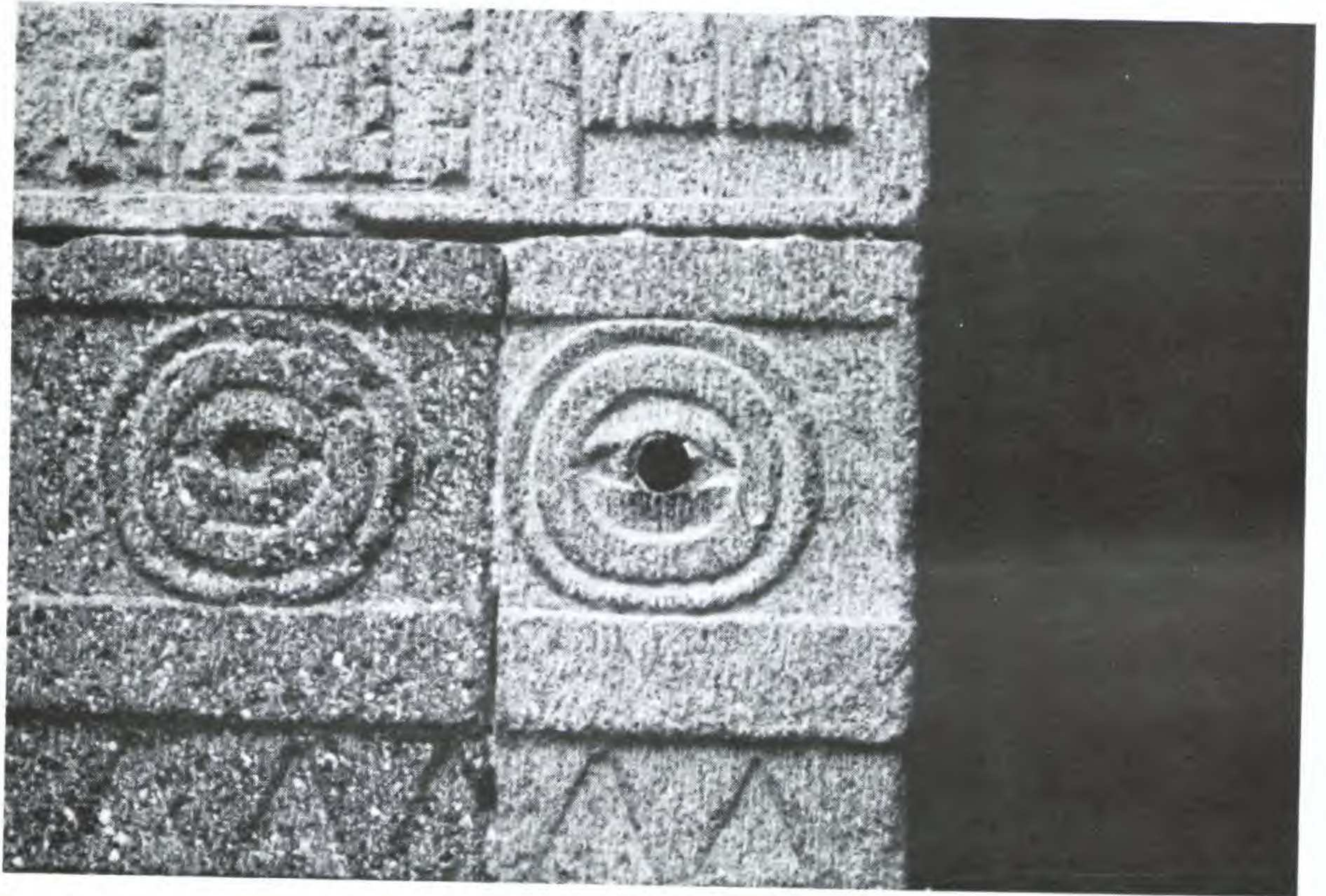


Plate 48. Closeup of 'disembodied eyes'.

PLATE 49

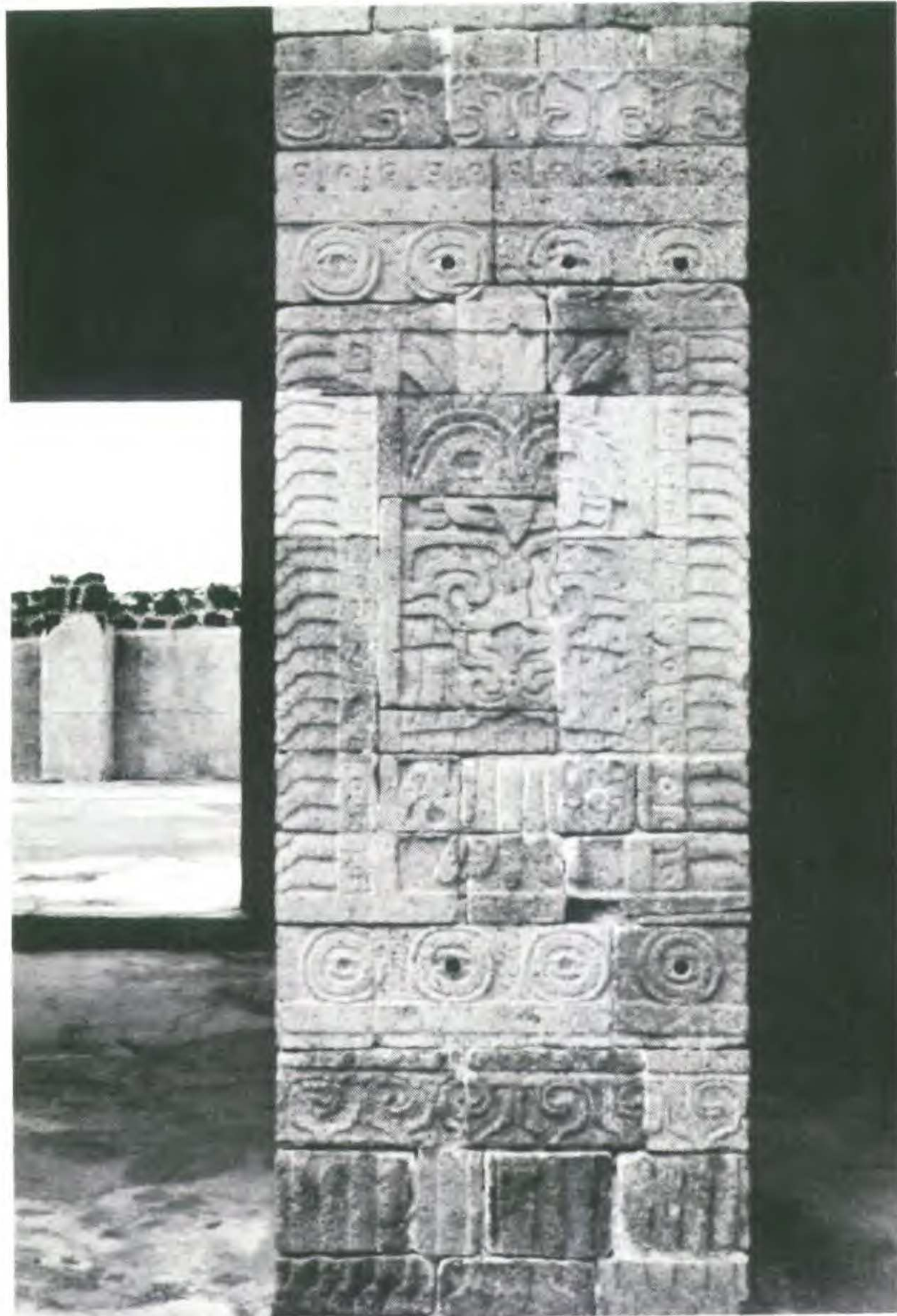


Plate 49. West column with frontal view of avian creature and 'disembodied eyes'.

PLATE 50



Plate 50. West side of courtyard, showing columns surmounted by painted lintel and carved stone 'combs'.

PLATE 51



Plate 51. Column, lintel and 'comb'.